GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Paper 9777/04
Independent Research Report

Key messages

The questions chosen should offer candidates the opportunity to show a response to the demand for intellectual challenge.

It is important that there should be reflection on the methods used in the research.

The evaluation of evidence should build on the work done in Global Perspectives.

General comment

The assessment by the relatively small number of Centres who entered candidates was variable and the importance of internal standardisation cannot be overestimated. The application of the mark scheme must be consistent when more than one person is assessing the work. This must be based on the criteria and comments must show how the key elements in each assessment objective have been met. In general, assessment of AO1 was firmly based on the criteria, but this was not always the case with AO2 and AO3. Most commonly, the marking at the top of the range was over generous, but in some cases marking in the range 30-40 over rewarded work which did not display higher level skills and was more of a descriptive essay. Teachers and markers should be aware of the nature of the report and its relationship with Global Perspectives. It is not a standalone project but an opportunity for candidates to deploy the critical skills developed in the first three papers. Everyone marking the reports should be aware that it is the skills which are being assessed and annotate appropriately. Having said that, there was some very realistic and sensitive assessment which credited the demonstration of critical skills appropriately and clearly saw the work in the context of GPR. This is a Pre-U qualification with an extended mark range to credit work which achieves a very high standard of analysis and judgement and it was pleasing when this was recognised in assessment by Centres. It is important that the quality and depth of argument and evaluation should be considered.

In terms of the range of issues and the obvious interest and enthusiasm shown, the reports showed the clear education value of the process of independent research. The comments on the individual assessment objectives must be placed within that context and candidates applauded for much hard work and thought.

AO1: The marks awarded were generally consistent with the comments about the degree of support offered by the Centre. This has been an encouraging development in recent series.

AO2: The demand for higher level marks is that a range of source materials are analysed using 'robust critical thinking techniques'. For Level 2 there should be analysis using critical thinking techniques and even for Level 1 there should be some application of critical thinking techniques. It would be helpful if Centre comments focused more on this aspect. Merely applying sources to the argument or explanation is not to offer analysis of source materials. Also, the evidence chosen must be relevant to the question and not just to the general topic.

One example that may help to explain what might be seen as limited application of critical thinking techniques to evidence is a professor at Colorado University. One candidate wrote: *'She has a PhD in Economics and teaches several economic classes. In the past she has also given classes about Pharmoeconomics. Besides she has written more articles on health subjects. This specific article is published in the Journal of Managerial and Decision Economics, a journal with peer-reviewed articles. This makes her article reliable. The arguments are credible since they support her viewpoint and follow a logic line of reasoning.'*

Higher level marks would only be justified if the basis of the argument is analysed or some corroboration is offered. Academic arguments cannot be fully justified simply by reference to their origins. There was much stronger evaluation offered which cross referenced evidence and referred to the methodology employed in research or flawed assumptions. To choose a source which is obviously outdated and then evaluate it by saying that it is outdated is to cast doubt on the methodology of the whole research project. One candidate was honest enough to say that he did not think a view on Global Warming was true but he did not know enough to be able to say why. This again is a reflection on the choice of topic and the depth of research rather than meaningful evaluation.

Often evaluative comments seem to be a starting point which should lead to deeper assessment of evidence. It is valuable that a critical stance has been taken, for example by looking at the origin of the evidence, but for higher level marks there should be a further process of critical evaluation. An interesting investigation into China's economic growth challenged the assumption, for instance, that GDP in itself was the best measure of progress while acknowledging the accuracy of the figures and the reliability of the source in terms of origin and corroboration with other economic data.

AO3: Generally this was more accurately assessed and many candidates sustained a relevant argument, but some questions did not lend themselves well to the type of discussion required by the IRR. Irrelevant or descriptive material should be clearly indicated. Also, though it is not compulsory to submit questions for approval, it might still be good practice to do this, as some titles were not in the form of questions at all and some offered limited scope for responding to intellectual challenge. Questions which take the form 'What are…' for instance are likely to lead to explanation not the higher level skill of evaluation. Questions should also be grammatical. However, there were many sustained discussions on a range of interesting topics which clearly engaged the interests and emotions of the candidates and there was much thoughtful writing. Given this, more attention to the reflection on the research process might have been more developed. In some cases this aspect, which is specified in the mark scheme, was unaccountably neglected or absent. As has been frequently said in reports, this is not an optional 'add on 'but rather integral to the whole process and important training for future report writing in both an academic and employment context.

AO4: There were some fluent and well-written reports and technical terms were mostly used appropriately. Centres assessed this aspect accurately in the main, but it should be noted that it is the communication of the candidates' arguments that should be commented on rather than merely grammatical accuracy.

AO5: It would be helpful to have more comment on why judgements have been made on this aspect. Choice of subjects which are highly technical does not always guarantee intellectual challenge, but it is often a matter of the depth of source material consulted and the critical approach taken. For example, the question 'In what way has the interpretation of fate, destiny and its connections changed from ancient view to modern view' involves some complex subject matter but limited evaluative opportunity.